

# ASCENSION Families

## Week 4: Love of Neighbor

### Pray

Pray one decade of the Rosary each day, focusing on the mystery of the Visitation. Reenter the scene of the Visitation, this time focusing on the virtue of Love of Neighbor. At the end of the decade, ask to receive this spiritual gift. Ask your Lord if there is a specific person to whom He is calling you to love in a fuller or more perfect way. Consider that the people who are most difficult to love are sometimes those who are closest to us. How would your family dynamic change if you were able to love your spouse and/or children with totally authentic, selfless, and life-giving love?

### Read

- 1 Cor. 13: 4-6: "Love is patient, love is kind. It is not jealous, it is not pompous, it is not inflated, it is not rude, it does not seek its own interests, it is not quick tempered, it does not brood over injury, it does not rejoice of wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth."
- Mat. 25:40: "Whatever you did for one of these least of Mine, you did for Me."
- St. Gregory the Great: "The proof of love is in the works. Where love exists, it works great things. But when it ceases to act, it ceases to exist."
- John 15:13: "Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends."

### Enter into the Scene

Choose just one of the passages listed above (or perhaps an alternate passage about love with which you are familiar). If you are inclined to do so, look-up the passage and read it in context. Or if not, sit quietly with your passage and see if new meaning or inspiration comes from it. Reenter the scene of the Visitation. You can use *The Visitation of Mary to Elizabeth* (attached) if needed, or enter into your own reflection. Look for and experience selfless love in this scene. Does the passage you chose give new light to the experience?

### Reflect

1. In the story of the Visitation, Mary and Elizabeth both appear to consider each other's needs before their own – even despite the fact that each of them is going through a major life event! Why do you think Elizabeth and Mary are so clearly able to recognize each other's needs? How are they able to serve one another when they each have so much happening in their own life? Have your circumstances ever clouded you from noticing or truly loving others?
2. The secret beauty that Mary experiences in early pregnancy will soon be displayed publicly as her pregnancy progresses. The scandal of unwed pregnancy will not be met with kindness or acceptance from most others. Imagine what Mary experiences when Elizabeth (who is already aware of Mary's pregnancy) greets her with such genuine love. Why is spiritual intimacy and companionship so important (or even necessary) for spiritual growth? Do you experience spiritual community, sisterhood, or brotherhood? Do you think that love of neighbor is a necessary precursor to spiritual friendship?

### Question

1. Why do you think love of neighbor is associated with the mystery of the Visitation?
2. The attached reflection suggests that Mary's relationship with Jesus is always fruitful. What do you think this means? Who is affected by Mary's relationship to Jesus and how? How does your relationship with Jesus affect others?



## Reflection: *The Visitation of Mary to Elizabeth*

Prayerfully we seek to encounter Jesus and Mary, imagining them just after the Annunciation:

Mary beholds the words of Gabriel; She ponders them and hides them deep within Her heart. She is satiated in the life of You, Her Son, continually attentive to Your presence. The reality of You, growing within Her, informs Her outward movements and interior meditations. In moments of profound prayer, it is as if She is able to meet You in the garden of Her own womb. She waits with You as You form; She studies You, loves You, and listens to You in silence. By this She becomes Your first disciple – observing You, following You, and growing with You.

The relationship Your Mother shares with You is always fruitful. Your life-giving love flows directly into Her, flowering out from Her toward others. Mary's first concern is for Elizabeth – how she is feeling and coping in the late stages of pregnancy. You Mother's attention never lingers on Herself, on Her own circumstance, or on the possible consequence of being both unwed and pregnant. She is not ignorant of the law or of the rejection She will endure from others. With great trust She gathers Her cares together and places them before You, orienting Herself outward in charity.

Your Mother acts swiftly; She makes travel arrangements, carefully bundles Her few belongings, and sets off to a small town in the hills of Judah. After a few days journey, She arrives at the home of Zechariah, and runs to find Elizabeth. Mary opens Her mouth to greet Elizabeth, but the Holy Spirit precedes Her and fills Elizabeth in His presence.

The baby who will grow to become John the Baptist, seems to joyfully dance and flutter within Elizabeth's womb. Her stomach jumps and bubbles with so much vigor that Elizabeth and Mary both smile at the spectacle. The room is full of energy, as if the air around everyone is being stirred. Brimming with zeal, Elizabeth receives the Holy Spirit. With her newly accepted gift of knowledge, Elizabeth begins praising You through the lens of Your Mother.

"Blessed are You among women, and blessed is the Fruit of Your womb! And who am I, that the Mother of my Lord should come to me?" Elizabeth proclaims these truths with humble magnitude, "Blessed are You who believed that what was spoken to You by the Lord would be fulfilled."

Your Mother's faith now seems to tower beautifully above the room, like a steeple or turret, spiraling into Heaven itself. Yet Her spirit remains simple, unimposing, and receptive to Her Lord's will. With a clear and humble voice, She sings the hymn that has been welling in Her heart since the night of Your Annunciation.

"My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my savior.  
For He has looked upon His handmaid's lowliness; behold, from now on all ages will call me blessed.  
The mighty one has done great things for me, and holy is His name."

The words of Her Magnificat bring You to us; She inundates us with Your presence. It is as if You are born before us and we are invited to cradle You and wrap You in our love. Even in Your smallness, Mary magnifies You. In Your hidden state, She brings us to You. She never tires of pointing toward You; She lays down Her life to bear and reveal Yours.

*Jesus, thank You for entering humanity through the conduit of Your Mother, who loves You and all others perfectly. During seasons of life when I lose sight of You, when You seem to temporarily disappear or withdraw, She is faithful to magnify You and reveal the secrets of Your hidden presence. Like Elizabeth, I am overcome with Your Mother's nearness. With Elizabeth I bow my head and say, "Who am I that the Mother of my Lord should come to me?"*

**JOYFULLY PROCLAIMING, CELEBRATING, WITNESSING, AND SERVING** *Together*